

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 002980

SIPDIS

STATE FOR ECA/A/E/USS RTAYLOR,
ECA/A/E/AF AMARTIN, ECA/A/E VRELLI-
MOREAU, AF/PD, IIP/G/AF, INFO AF/W
LAGOS FOR PAS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [SCUL](#) [OIIP](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: THE AMERICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA
CONDUCTS A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Ref: A) SecState 102568; B) Ghebreab-Taylor E-mail of
5/9/02

¶1. Summary: The 9th annual conference of the American Studies Association of Nigeria convened in Calabar, July 9-12, 2002. "American Studies" specialists from Nigerian federal, state, and private universities compared U.S. and Nigerian laws pertaining to ethnicity, citizenship, and democracy. This year's meeting was extraordinary, primarily due to effective planning. The conference attracted over 100 distinguished academics including the keynote speaker, Dr. Adell Patton, Associate Professor of African History and African Diaspora, University of Missouri at St. Louis. Sixteen excellent academic papers highlighting the theme of the conference in law, literature, political science, and history were presented. A roundtable discussion, the capstone of the seminar, elicited lively and extensive discussions on citizenship and human rights issues in the United States and Nigeria.

In his presentation, Dr. Patton urged Nigeria to "selectively borrow" democratic principles from the U.S. experience so that the country could "leapfrog" into the social and technological era of progress. He also advocated a strong civic education program and reconciliation among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. He provided his perspective on how the various groups in the United States - a nation of immigrants - have become inclusive and citizens within the American nation. "But for Africa, ethnicity, citizenship, and democracy will always be problematic until the continent comes to grips with the nature of its colonial experience. The legacy of the colonial 'Native Authority' and its customary law of tribalism is still present in Africa under the guise of patrimonialism," he said. Dr. Patton, who specializes in Nigeria and has done extensive research and writing on the country, also addressed academics and students at the University of Jos, Ahmadu Bello University, the University of Ibadan, and the University of Lagos. This is a GPRA report. End Summary.

¶2. The American Studies Association of Nigeria (ASAN), one of Nigeria's leading academic associations, held its 2002 annual conference in Calabar, July 9-11. The theme for the three-day seminar was "Ethnicity, Citizenship, and Democracy in the United States of America." Dr. Patton served as the keynote speaker at the conference. Sixteen other distinguished scholars also delivered very stimulating papers on issues of ethnicity, citizenship, and democracy in the U.S. and Nigeria.

¶3. Nigeria's democratization is facing serious challenges, and this year's ASAN conference provided an opportunity for American Studies specialists across Nigeria to critically examine the current democratic environment in the country drawing useful lessons from the U.S. experience. In studying ethnicity, citizenship and democracy in the U.S., what should Nigeria selectively borrow, if anything, from the U.S. system of laws? Dr. Patton made a number of useful suggestions. To build a nation that is inclusive of all groups, Professor Patton urged Nigerian leaders to reconcile the legacy of the "Biafran Civil War" and rebuild the East with federal funds as was done during the post-Civil War era in the U.S. He also recommended affirmative action programs to help redress economic and social inequalities experienced

by the Nigerian minority groups against the "tyranny of the majority." The issue of human rights in this regard, he emphasized, becomes paramount and will give universal respect to Nigeria.

14. To deal with the minority question of the Niger Delta region, Dr. Patton also recommended the State of Alaska formula of sharing oil profits. In the United States, he said, people from Alaska are exempted from paying taxes. The profit from the sale of oil after production expenditures is shared and returned to the people in the form of tax refunds. Professor Patton further advocated the creation of a "Civil Rights Commission" consisting of internal and external members to report on the state of "unfreedoms" in the State-Nation and need for Civil Rights legislation to protect minority interests. To accommodate minority interests, the Government of Nigeria should establish a National Equal Opportunity Commission (NEOC) with guidelines for equal employment opportunity based on merit.

15. Dr. Patton also called for the teaching of civics at the elementary and secondary school levels followed by two semesters of Nigerian national history with emphasis on reconciliation and pride in the nation. Civics, he said, teaches about the founding fathers, patriotism, ethics of behavior, and the need to have respect for each other no matter what one's ethnic background or religion, etc. The Federal Government should be responsible for the education of citizens within the nation - women, men, girls, and boys. Only then, Professor Patton said, could citizenship within the nation become a reality and ethnicity decline.

16. Considering the fragile experience of democracy in Nigeria, American Studies specialists at the ASAN conference were most interested in learning how groups in the U.S. have become inclusive and citizens within the American nation. Dr. Patton's participation provided the desired direction and kept the discussion on track. Recalling actions taken by President Truman to achieve racial integration in the U.S., Professor Patton told the conference participants that the Truman Administration deserves credit for strengthening citizenship and democracy, and de-emphasizing ethnicity and racial identity in the United States. President Truman, he said, invented the phrase, "Civil Rights" and used it as a tool to address the old problem of racial discrimination in the U.S. Patton told the conference participants that on December 5, 1946, President Truman did something that no other president had done: He issued Executive Order 9808, establishing the first Presidential Multi-Racial Civil Rights Committee of 15 distinguished citizens, whites and blacks. Through the work of this Committee, in 1946 President Truman was able to address the four basic rights: the right to safety and security of persons; the right to citizenship and its privileges; the right to freedom of conscience and expression; and the right of equal opportunity against de jure discrimination.

17. Dr. Patton also made several references to President Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" programs. He argued that the "Civil Rights Act" of 1964, which established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), was an important reference in the study of ethnicity and citizenship in the United States. "While citizenship in the West was based on rights and duties, the concept of citizenship in Africa was based on colonial experiences. Colonialism simply decentralized despotism, and democracy cannot emerge until the segregated states from colonialism are transformed," remarked Dr. Patton.

18. Professor Patton and the conference participants criticized the Nigerian Constitution as "nothing less than a tribal document." The ASAN conference observed that whereas the U.S. Constitution guarantees full citizenship to all Americans by making provisions that enforce it, in Nigeria, constitutional aberrations continue to promote ethnicity and "indigeneship" across the country. Thus, the seminar advocated a constitutional provision that would allow for permanent residency for any Nigerian, irrespective of ethnic or religious background, after six months of stay in any community of one of the Nigerian states.

19. In addition to the conference, Dr. Patton

addressed academics and students at the University of Jos, Ahmadu Bello University, the University of Ibadan and the University of Lagos. Additionally, in Abuja, he addressed senior staff of the Institute for Peace, Research, and Conflict Resolution. In attendance at the Abuja program were Ambassador Jeter, and the Nigerian Minister for Integration and Cooperation in Africa, Dr. Abimbola Ogunkelu. In Ibadan, Dr. Patton participated in a roundtable discussion with members of the Nigerian Society for Information, Arts, and Culture (NSIAC). These extra program activities arranged by both PAS Abuja and Lagos proved fortuitous in our efforts to strengthen democracy in this important country. The visit also helped us to reach key players in the current democratic experience in Nigeria with up-to-date information on how democracy has continued to shape the destiny of the United States.

10. GPRA Data:

Result/Impact: Outstanding. The selection of the theme, ethnicity, citizenship, and democracy was timely and appropriate. Through the able direction of Dr. Patton, conference participants were able to critically examine issues of ethnicity, citizenship, and democracy within the Nigerian context. While the American Studies specialists agreed that there are no universal principles on citizenship, they also agreed with Dr. Patton's suggestions regarding some useful lessons for Nigeria from the U.S. model as defined by the 14th Amendment of the American Constitution. The attendance of Dr. Patton greatly enhanced the quality of discussions at the conference.

Date: July 9-11, 2002, FY 2002, Fourth Quarter

MPP UMBRELLA THEMES: Strengthening Institutions that Bear on the Understanding of the U.S.

AUDIENCE REACHED: Over 100 American Studies specialists from federal, state and private institutions attended the conference. Also in attendance were senior administrators of the University of Calabar including the Vice Chancellor, Professor Ivara Esu, and Professor (Mrs.) Ebele Eko, Deputy Vice Chancellor for academic matters. A substantial number of graduate and undergraduate students from the university were also present. Given the level and quality of discussion at this conference, we envision that these American Studies specialists will expand the debate on ethnicity, citizenship, and democracy with thousands of graduate and undergraduate students during their classroom lessons thereby reaching out to a significant number of future Nigerian leaders. During his visit, Dr. Patton addressed about 800 people.

NON-USG FUNDING: N/A

QUALITY OF U.S. SUPPORT: Excellent. Thanks to ECA/A/E/USS for funding the conference and ECA/A/E/AF for sponsoring Dr. Patton under the Fulbright Specialist Program.

COMMENT: If success could be measured in terms of growth, the American Studies Association of Nigeria (ASAN) has done well indeed. Over the years, ASAN has continued to attract the best of Nigerian scholars into its fold. ASAN has over one thousand registered faculty members who teach a wide range of courses on American society and culture. The National Universities Commission recently approved the University of Jos diploma program in American Studies, which was put on hold by the Abacha regime and shelved for over 10 years. This is one of the many success stories of ASAN activities on Nigerian campuses. Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria will host the ASAN 2003 conference in February when the Association will mark its 10th anniversary and has selected the theme, "American Society Since the Four Freedoms." The February conference will coincide with African American History Month, and post hopes that ECA/A/E/USS funds for the conference will be available by November 2002 in order to facilitate a grant for ASAN. ASAN has requested USD 25,000. PAS Nigeria requests that ECA/A/E/USS provide enough funds to support the program.

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